

# LEARNING BESIDE THEM

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There aren't many occupations where there is this freedom and opportunity to spend our days immersed in the exploration of our world. Even as a public school teacher (a position I had hoped would afford me this life of constant learning) this wasn't overly possible. There was a little exploration and a lot of assessment, assignments, curriculums, division outcomes, testing, bells, and behaviour management. Most of those things are considerable hurdles to curiosity and learning.

But we who've chosen this home education life have this beautifully unique opportunity to dive into this lifestyle of learning and to grow and expand our hearts, our minds and our wonder. We also get to model and facilitate that lifestyle for our kids with a wisdom gained along the way that allows us to truly value the opportunity and see the big picture.

Left to their own devices my children wouldn't know half of the opportunities out there that exist for them. Sure they're curious and are often self led learners but there is a richness and a depth that I can offer them that comes from life experience and creativity.



We do work independent study into our days and I value that time. I see it as a wilderness base camp where I as the ranger give them the information they need to know to start out and then I send them on their way. During our current season though I see us more often running hand in hand through the woods, stopping to investigate every and anything that piques our interest.



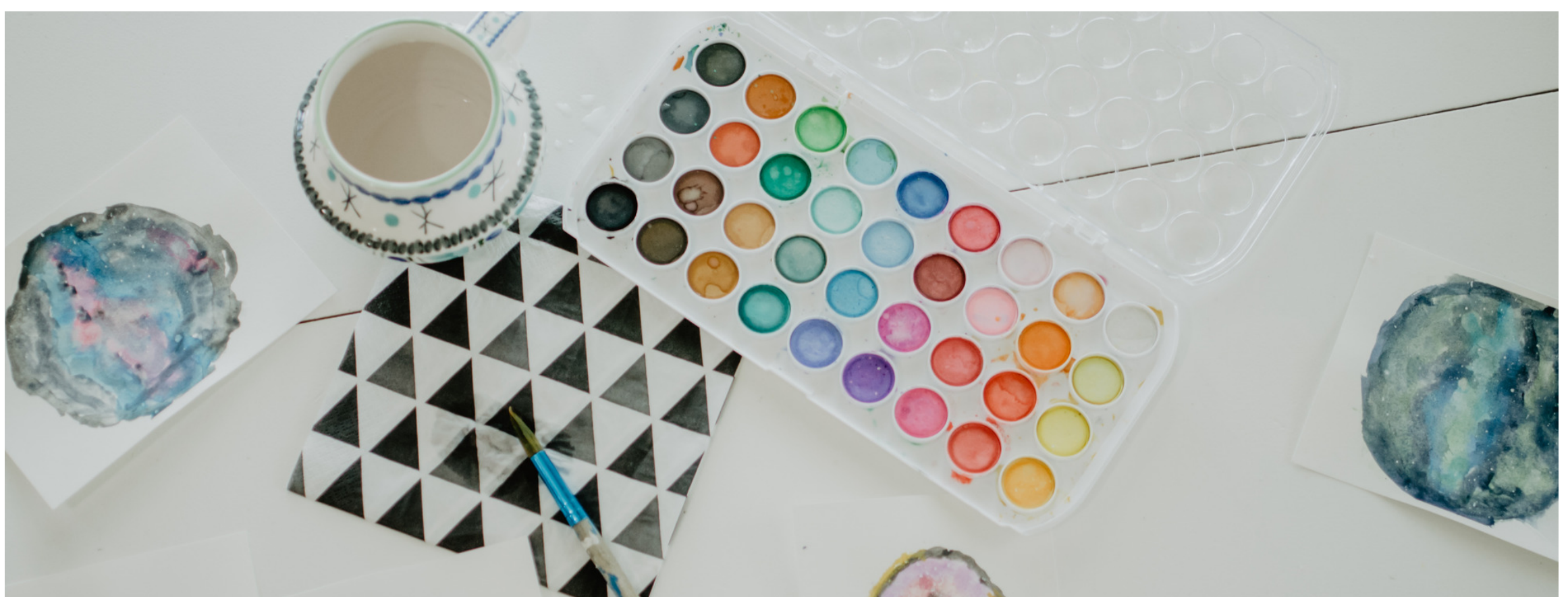
# HOW I LEARN BESIDE MY CHILDREN

I'll admit that when I first started homeschooling I defaulted to school at home complete with schedules and binders full of unit plans. I was used to keeping junior high students attention and thought my kids would be so excited to have me teach. They were not. They were excited to be with me. As the years have gone on we have been settling deeper and deeper into this lifestyle of learning. As we settle I spend less time in front of them and more time beside them.

The following are some of the ways I “get beside them.”

## **BE PRESENT**

As a public school teacher whenever my students were quietly working or watching a video I was marking, prepping, or photocopying. It made me very efficient but not overly present. At home this became meal prep, laundry, and business emails. I've learned to take my “productivity” down a notch and engage the same material my kids are engaging. If it's a documentary I watch it with them, I sit and listen to the audio book or I'm the one reading the book aloud and fully enthralled alongside them. When I'm present, conversations naturally happen. Questions are asked, we can pause and dialogue. I am forever pausing documentaries and books to fill them in on relevant bits of history or information, to ask if they “caught” something, and to gather predictions on what might happen next. I am also learning so much and thoroughly enjoying all this fantastic literature.





Welcome to the Museum

# Animalium

by KATIE SCOTT and JENNY BROOM

Welcome to *Animalium*.  
This museum is open all hours.  
It houses an astonishing  
collection of more than 300  
animals for visitors of all ages.  
Learn how animals have evolved,  
see inside the dissection laboratory,  
and discover the amazing variety of habitats on Earth.  
Enter here to explore the animal kingdom in all its glory.

BIG



## **CULTIVATE CURIOSITY**

I've let loose my inner three year old and constant "whys" come out of me. So many of my sentences start with "I wonder..." When we learn to ask questions there is inspiration to find answers. My curiosity isn't relegated just to home school pursuits, it spills over into my entire life. I want to know how houses are wired so I can figure out my own electrical, I want to know how to miter a perfect corner, I want to know how my brain creates new pathways so I can change my life with my thoughts, and I want to know why the gut is called the second brain. When you model a life of unfettered curiosity and the pursuit of answers you create a culture of curiosity within your home and your kids will engage their own questions as well.

## PARTICIPATE

Do what they do! Activities don't have to just be for the kids.

**Art** | There isn't an art project that I don't do with my kids. I love it. I've grown so much in my ability to create with different mediums because I am constantly drawing, painting, and building with my children. It also means that I often choose projects that have a broad appeal and are interesting for me as well. Lately we've been working water colour techniques into our science journals, responses to literature and art. I've enjoyed it so much that it's become an individual pastime and hobby as well.

**Copy Work** | Copying passages doesn't sound overly exciting but I've discovered Hand Lettering and I LOVE it! While my children work on copy work and learning cursive I am beside them practicing the art of hand lettering and faux calligraphy. Not only do I love doing it and find it a skill I use a lot, it also displays value for what I'm asking of my kids when they see me choosing to do it as well.





**Writing** | When my kids are starting in on a new writing project I always model the format and flow to them first. I do this not with a prefab example but I will sit down with them, talk them through my process and then write. I enjoy asking for their input and ideas and will incorporate them into my writing. When they are independently writing I will write for myself as well. It may be a blog post, notes for a speaking engagement or a journal entry. I could list all the reasons it's good for my children that I write beside them but it's good for me too.

**Explore** | We spend a lot of time exploring and I've developed a keen eye for interesting things in nature. On a paddle board I can spot a snapping turtle from about 150 yards away and am constantly pointing out curious finds. Getting to experience these things with my kids cultivates an eagerness to know more and inspires at home learning as well.



**Adventure** | Closely related to exploring is embracing adventure! Sometimes it can be tempting as parents to sit on the sidelines and cheer our kids on. This is awesome but I'm finding with my family that they love it when we adventure with them. At times this has meant conquering my own fears like when we zip lined from treetops over an alligator breeding marsh (home to over 200 alligators) in Florida. We paddle board and explore new parts of the river we've never seen, we take off to the woods in the winter with survival packs and hatchets to create shelters and up our survival game, we hike new trails, and we explore beaches and caverns. All that said there are times when I do sit on the sideline like when claustrophobia got the best of me ten feet in to a half mile hike into a cave near Rushmore!

It is such a privilege to facilitate wonder in our daily lives. I am becoming more and more intentional to learn beside my kids and we're all benefiting from it.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Monique is a former Junior High teacher turned homeschooler. She lives in a 105 year old house with her insanely tall husband and two children and likes to shiplap all the things. In addition to being a homeschool mom Monique is a maker, photographer, writer and speaker.

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